

1
3
ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3 (SECTION 1)

CHICAGO TRIBUNE
20 March 1986



Mike
Royko

Marcos stole it fair and square

In a way, it doesn't seem fair that this country is now helping dig out Ferdinand Marcos' awesome financial stash so the new Philippine government can try to get some of it back.

Oh, there's no question that he and his wife are a couple of thieves on the grandest of scales. In Chicago, the FBI is hot after some politicians who took a few thousand dollars in bribes. Mrs. Marcos spent more than that on black bras.

But we should remember that the fun couple didn't start looting their country at the last minute. To make off with as much as \$10 billion took many years of tireless grabbing. Moments after Marcos held up his hand to take his first oath of office, he stuck out the same hand for his first kickback.

And all the time Ferdie and his sweetie were piling it up, this country knew. Maybe not down to the last centavo, but within a billion or two, which in their case is close enough.

Our government knew. The CIA kept track of how much they stole, how they did it and where they were squirreling it away. That's part of the CIA's job—to note what rogues our friends are. Members of Congress were told and, presumably, the people in the White House and the State Department.

It was our business for a number of reasons: our historic ties to the Philippines, our need to have military bases there, the efforts of communists to get a revolution going, and the vast sums we sent in aid.

But what did we do about it? Did we give Marcos a firm nudge and tell him that we couldn't be his friend and supporter if he didn't stop trying to make Al Capone look like a shoplifter?

Just the opposite. We not only looked the other way but our elected leadership hailed Marcos as a great patriot, a champion of liberty, a friend of this country and a beloved leader of his own people.

And we kept on sending money, while Marcos worked out schemes to reroute some of it to his Swiss bank accounts and other investments.

What was Marcos supposed to think when an American president pats him on the back and tells him what a fine job he's doing?

Marcos surely knew that we knew what a crook he was. And if he knew that we knew, he could be forgiven for assuming that we didn't object.

He probably figured that we were giving him what is known in Chicago's City Hall and courtrooms as the old wink and nod.

So Imelda would fly over to buy a few million dollars worth of lace nighties, and Ferdie would go on building a real estate empire in this country.

Even an old mistress named Dovie spent a few million on California real estate. One thing you can say for Ferdie—he was no cheap john.

Right up to the end, when he had to blow town before his loving subjects gave him a Mussolini farewell, we were there to help.

The President's men told him, don't, worry, Ferdie, come here and you'll be safe. We even provided first-class Air Force transportation. Far superior, it might be noted, to the kind of planes many of our own GIs fly in, and die in.

With trust in his heart, he tossed a few things in a bag, including a million or two in walking around money, and came to this country believing that when we promised him safety his stash would be safe, too.

Why shouldn't he have been trusting? Nobody ever told him: Ferdie, don't buy all that real estate in New York, California and Texas. We just gave him the wink and the nod and told him we were pals forever.

And who can blame him for feeling betrayed now that we're turning over all kinds of documents to the Aquino government so they can trace his holdings?

What Marcos should do is go in to court and give his side of it. He should explain his wealth the way an old-time Chicago politician once did, "I stole it fair and square."

And if he needs character witnesses, there ought to be someone in the White House who will speak up for him. Again.